

Approximately one year ago, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) made a decision to change the way that we conduct assessments and develop service plans for families involved in the child welfare system.

This decision was based on several factors including staff comments that the old assessment tool was cumbersome and unwieldy, results of the Federal Child and Family Service Review finding our assessment and service planning processes to be deficient, and comments by independent consultants that we need to do a better job of focusing the work of the agency on risk and aligning service plans to explicitly meet identified needs.

A diverse work group representing child welfare and juvenile justice staff was established to develop the new assessment and service planning processes and accompanying tool. Lorrie Lutz, from the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning assisted us in our efforts. Over the past year that work group determined the assessment process must include the following:

- A research based tool that focuses on risk and protective capacity;
- Engagement of families throughout the assessment and service planning process;
- A direct link between the content of the service plan and the information learned during the assessment;
- An approach to service planning that integrates family strengths into objectives and tasks to ensure success rather than compliance; and
- Integration of an ongoing assessment to the service plan review process.

After careful review of numerous tools suggested to us by our consultant, we chose a validated risk assessment instrument that allows us to directly link our assessment information to the service plan. The process requires that staff determine if children/youth are at risk of abuse or neglect by compiling and synthesizing information in the following risk domains:

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| • Child Mental Health/Developmental Stability | • Child/Caregiver Substance Abuse |
| • Child Educational Stability | • Child/Caregiver General History of Violence or Criminal Behavior |
| • Child/Caregiver Medical or Dental Needs | • Caregivers History of Child Abuse/Neglect |
| • Child Vulnerability/Ability to Self Protect | • Kinship/Community/Peer Supports |
| • Parenting Skills, Empathy and Bonding | • Family Violence |
| • Caregiver Mental Health | • Financial Stability of the Family |

If a decision has been made that a child/youth is at risk of future maltreatment in any of the above areas, DCYF staff will seek to identify protective capacities that exist within the family that can mitigate the need for formal intervention. For example, DCYF staff will assess if relatives or individuals with whom the family/child/youth has a significant relationship can be “tapped” to address the specific risk identified. If protective capacities cannot be identified within the family or extended family system, then intervention is required. The behavior changes that the family needs to make to address the identified risk and the accompanying services to support those behavior changes are documented in the family’s service plan. The service plan will be reviewed informally

during routine meetings with the child/youth and family and formally every six months to determine if the services are effectively resulting in behavior changes. If the services are not effectively impacting the behaviors that put the child/youth or community at risk, the plan will be modified.

It is our belief that this comprehensive risk and protective capacity assessment and strength based service planning process will enhance the work of the agency, better focusing our efforts on what families actually need to ensure child and community safety. Limited resources will be dedicated to addressing behaviors that directly link to the risk of future maltreatment.

This new process replaces the existing Family Assessment, Re-assessments and previous versions of a social history (Pinks, Blues and Case Profile Narratives). The assessment of the twelve domain areas in the Risk and Protective Capacity Assessment and the accompanying Service Plan is the information that DCYF will provide to community providers upon referral.